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ABSTRACT

In 1993, Chattanooga State Technical Community College (CSTCC), in Tennessee, experienced its first drop in enrollment in 7 years. In an effort to increase enrollment, the CSTCC adopted a new approach to marketing. First, external factors that indicated a potential further decline in enrollment were examined and a four-part strategy that included research, program development, outreach, and promotion was implemented to respond to the changing external forces. Research initiatives included analyses of local economic development and demographic studies and annual surveys of students. Programs developed in response to findings included on-site college-level courses for business and industry; 25 specialized, short courses, most for 1 hour of college credit; and flex entry classes, allowing students to add classes up to 2 weeks into the semester. Outreach efforts consisted of mail and telephone recruitment, increasing hours of operation and sites to facilitate student registration, disseminating information at malls, organizing town meetings, and visits to high schools and over 175 area businesses. With respect to promotional activities, CSTCC offset declines in available resources by utilizing electronic and print media advertising, outdoor display advertising, an information center at the shopping mall, and a cable television "documercial." As a result of these efforts, the college managed to achieve its goals of maintaining the level of enrolled credits and increasing previous enrollment rates, enrolling 8,728 credit students and serving 10,340 total students in the fall 1994 semester. (TGI)

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IT'S PERFECT FOR YOU

The 1994 Recruitment Effort of Chattanooga State Technical Community College

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Conference on Teaching Excellence Austin TX

(17th, Austin, TX, May 21-24, 1995)

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May, 1995

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OVERVIEW

For several years in the late 1980s and into the 90s, Chattanooga State Technical Community College had grown rapidly. The College had built a solid reputation for quality academic programs and community service. Additionally, there were significant changes in the Chattanooga area economy that had created a large pool of working people who were affected by plant closings and downsizing. Chattanooga State began putting significant amounts of money into promotion and advertising to let people know of programs at the College. The post-secondary enrollment of the college peaked in 1992 when the College enrolled 10,076 students in credit and vocational programs.

In 1993, Chattanooga State experienced its first drop in enrollment in seven years. The implications for even the relatively slight decline (3.6%) were great. The greatest impact was upon funding. Since CSTCC is funded only through tuition and state reimbursement, even this modest decline cost the institution at least $300,000.

ANALYSIS

As the College looked ahead to 1994, there were several external factors that indicated that the potential for a further significant decline in enrollment was eminent. Among these external forces were:

- A decline in the population of the under 20 year-olds. Each year for the past six years, the number of high school graduates in the College's six-county service area declined.

- The very healthy state of the local economy, with unemployment at or below 5%, meant that there were many who would work instead of taking classes.

- Chattanooga's population has declined for the past three decades; therefore, in spite of having the highest market penetration rate of any community college in Tennessee, Chattanooga State has a diminishing pool of potential students.

- The area work force has drastically changed over the past decade from a manufacturing base to a service economy. Yet, Chattanooga State had no programs to respond to newly-developed job areas such as tourism and hospitality, insurance, and small business.

During the fall semester of 1993, the College's **1994-1998 Strategic Plan** stated that enrollment growth was central to the ability of Chattanooga State to fulfill its mission. The same document recognized a major shift in the definition of its "customers." The College now defines its primary customers as the employers in business, industry, and government, and the higher education institutions that receive CSTCC transfer students. Students are considered as "stake holders" in the educational process. As a result of this shift in emphasis, and in response to the desire to expand enrollment, the College adopted a new approach to marketing.

CSTCC'S RESPONSE

In the past, the College had responded to the needs for student recruitment through a healthy expenditure on advertising and an outreach effort aimed primarily at high school students. Recognizing the need to respond to changing external forces, CSTCC approached 1994 enrollment with a four-way strategy:

- **Research**. Under the direction of the Director of Institutional Research, a careful analysis of data from external sources and from internally-developed surveys and assessments gave the marketing effort the necessary foundation for effective action.

- **Program development**. In response to identified needs, Chattanooga State instituted a number of new courses and programs. Central to this effort was the creation of more than fifty short courses that carried college credit, but were on very specific topics or were classes that met for shorter periods of time.

- **Outreach**. In February, an Enrollment Management Team was formed. More than 150 ideas were generated at the initial meeting of this vary diverse group that represented all areas of the College. Ultimately, through mail, telephone, and personal contact,

approximately 15,000 potential students were reached. Over 175 area businesses were visited by representatives from the College and Community Relations Office, with the promise of establishing on-site credit classes whenever it was feasible.

• **Promotion**. In actuality, the budgeted amount available for college-wide advertising was 30 percent less than the prior year. To offset the decline in available resources and still avoid a decline in enrollment, CSTCC's Division of Institutional Advancement crafted a promotional strategy based upon a comprehensive mix of electronic and print media advertising, outdoor advertising, a mall "store-front" that attracted over 500 prospective students, and a three-hour, live TV "documercial."

KEY COMPONENTS

Outreach

Mail. Letters were targeted to all students who had attended Chattanooga State in the previous three years, yet had not pre-registered for Fall 1994. Other mail lists were generated for students who had not completed their application process.

In-take. Improvements were made in the intake process to make certain that prospective students were able to enroll with as much convenience as possible. Hours of operation were extended in the evenings and on weekends. In addition, full registration was available at four outlying sites.

Telephones. In coordination with the mailing, lists were generated to telephone potential students. A comprehensive telephone recruitment training process was given to more than 100 volunteers who called. In one night, over 5,000 calls were made using a telephone bank of volunteers that were incorporated into the live TV documercial. In all, nearly 15,000 calls were made by CSTCC employees and students.

Mall & Wal-Mart outreach. For five weeks, Chattanooga State rented a store in the Hamilton Place Mall, the largest shopping mall in Tennessee. Staffed with retired faculty and staff, information was given to more than 500 individuals, Other personnel were at area Wal-Mart stores handing out literature and answering questions.

Business outreach. To better serve the college's defined customers, the College and Community Relations Office visited over 175 area

businesses to set-up on-site credit courses.

Town meetings and workshops. A series of town meetings were held in the rural counties to gather opinions about the College and to inform residents about the College. Several "College: Not for Kids Only" workshops were conducted for non-traditional students.

Highs school visits and college fairs. The outreach effort maintained a steady contact with all area high schools. In addition to recruiter visits, Dr. Jim Catanzaro, CSTCC President, went to each high school in the area to talk about the college.

Program Development

Business on-site courses. In conjunction with the outreach effort, academic divisions were called upon to modify curricula, schedule classes, and hire qualified adjuncts to teach on-site college-level courses for business and industry.

Short courses. Over fifty short courses, mostly for one hour of college credit, that were specialized in nature. The engineering technology division and the humanities division each responded with over 25 new classes.

New programs. A new degree program in Hospitality Management was approved and implemented for 1994. Courses are also offered in Insurance Management for a degree program that will be implemented next year.

Flex entry classes. Many sections of late-start or "flex entry" classes were scheduled. This gave students an opportunity to add a class as late as two weeks after the semester began.

Research

External sources. Chattanooga State reviews U.S. census data and local economic development and demographic studies regularly to determine current trends. In addition, the College was allowed to examine marketing studies conducted by a local arts agency that provided valuable insight. The marketing research effort also relies on consistent use of the research literature on community colleges.

Surveys. The Institutional Research Office conducts annual surveys of our students to determine factors that influenced their attendance at Chattanooga State. The demographic data allowed the outreach and promotion components to target potential students. Additionally, it

served as the impetus to alter the Fall 1994 Class Schedule to accommodate students.

Promotion

Course schedule. The principal marketing piece for CSTCC is the Class Schedule. Two editions are published and mailed to each household in the six counties served by CSTCC and to three neighboring counties in Georgia. The schedule contains editorial stories that call attention to the "It's Perfect for You Theme" and to new programs. Each edition of the Fall 1994 schedule had a distribution of 250,000.

Outdoor displays. The 1994 slogan, "It's Perfect for You," was born during the initial marketing strategy session as a theme appropriate for billboards. Two large paper boards were designed, one with attractive, young people in casual dress, and a second with people in working clothes. Twenty-three large boards were placed for five months. Additionally, 40 small boards were used for the last three months. An offshoot of the billboard was the storefront display that was made available to CSTCC in a vacant downtown building.

Electronic media. The College cut back on its electronic media this year. However, $25,000 were allocated for radio and $25,000 for television. Additionally, the College extensively used its own cable access channel and WAWL, the alternative-rock format college radio station for promotional announcements.

Newspaper. A series of full-page newspaper ads were placed leading to the Fall, 1994, semester. Newspaper advertising allowed the college to detail the specific course offerings that were new, including the one-hour short courses and the flex entry sections.

Documercial. The CSTCC Media Services Department produced a three-hour live program that highlighted all program areas of the school, the registration process, financial aid, etc. In addition, the program featured many local political figures and community leaders who appeared with the President. The program was edited down to a two-hour show and this was played repeatedly on our cable channel and over other cable systems in the rural areas.

RESULTS

The enrollment goal for Chattanooga State Technical Community College was two-fold. First, to maintain the level of credit students

enrolled at the College to match the previous fall's students, or 8,765. Secondly, the College wanted to exceed 10,000 students served in credit, vocational, and ABE programs.

Chattanooga State had 8,728 credit students, or 37 students less than the goal. However, the total students served came up to 10,340.

CONCLUSION

While the College was slightly below its target for credit students, the overall campaign was a tremendous success. The closest community college to Chattanooga State had a decline of nearly 10%, and the feeling is that CSTCC would have faced a similar loss without the concentrated effort that was made.

There were, however, two very significant outcomes of the effort that go beyond the measurement of numbers. First, all of the outreach and advertising efforts have helped to solidify the reputation of Chattanooga State as a critical part of the community. Evidence of the high esteem with which people view CSTCC is seen in two recent economic development research studies that identify the college as the institution having the greatest impact on economic development. Secondly, and perhaps most significant, was the team effort put forth by the entire college in getting the word out about Chattanooga State. Virtually all of the faculty and staff were heavily involved. It has been a most rewarding experience to all of us.